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SUBJECT: SERBIA: DRASKOVIC TO FORM ELECTION COALITION WITH DS

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SUMMARY

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1. (SBU) Former Foreign Minister and leader of the Serbian Renewal Movement, Vuk Draskovic, told the Ambassador March 12 that he intended to join a coalition with the Democratic Party for the May elections. Draskovic encouraged Washington and Pristina to accept Kosovo Serbs participation in the May elections. The United States should emphasize its historical friendship with Serbia in an effort to move beyond Kosovo, and Serbia's international interests will be best served when Serbia has a strong democratic state at home, Draskovic said. End Summary.

DRASKOVIC TO FORM COALITION WITH DS

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2. (SBU) Draskovic, leader of the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO) told the Ambassador that he was negotiating with President Boris Tadic's Democratic Party (DS) to form a pro-EU coalition for the May 11 election. It was essential for "democratic forces to do everything possible to win a majority (in the May election) in order to avoid disaster," Draskovic said. He said his coalition with the DS was only natural, since he could not support the Democratic Party of Serbia's (DSS) and Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica's "suicide policy of isolation." Draskovic said he had "an obligation to defeat the policy of defeat," and thus was committed to moving Serbia towards its European future. He hoped he would reach an agreement with the DS in the near future.

ACCEPT KOSOVO-SERB PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS

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13. (SBU) Draskovic said he believed Kostunica would push to have Kosovo-Serbs participate in the elections. He stressed this was a right Serbs had under UN Resolution 1244, which was still in effect, and under the Ahtisaari plan, which permits dual citizenship. He urged the United States to consult closely with Pristina to encourage the Kosovo Albanians "to close their eyes to Serb participation in the elections and to encourage (the Kosovar Albanian's) patient behavior." He said it was important for the Serbs in Kosovo to express their own political will in the elections.

U.S. SHOULD PROMOTE HISTORICAL FRIENDSHIP WITH SERBIA

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14. (SBU) Draskovic said the United States should encourage Serbia to move past Kosovo by focusing on the close bilateral friendship of the last century. He suggested the United States to issue a statement reaffirming its appreciation to Serbia as an ally in the world wars and stressing our dedication to this historical friendship. "The United States has not betrayed our historical friendship, but rather someone in Serbia did, and for this reason, the United States is right to support Serbia's pro-democratic forces," Draskovic said. He encouraged the United States "to take the offensive" of reminding Serbia of the strong friendship in the past.

SERBIA'S INTERESTS BEST SERVED THROUGH STRONG DEMOCRACY

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15. (SBU) Serbia would best serve its international agenda by

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developing a strong democratic state at home, Draskovic said. "My Serb nationalism is not against other nations, or my own nation, but instead is focused on building a strong state at home," Draskovic said. He was disappointed that his erstwhile friend, the Crown Prince, attended the February 21 rally for Kosovo led by Radical and DSS figures, concluding that he was a "good western educated man" who was just "thinking the wrong way." He said Serbia needed the EU and the United States to further strengthen its democracy, citing empowerment programs on the local level and economic assistance for Serbia's underdeveloped regions. Draskovic said he had "an obligation" to tell Serbs "not to be blind any longer" and to work with the West in developing this strong democratic state.

COMMENT

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16. (SBU) Draskovic's party is small. The SPO won only 3.1% of the vote in the January 2007 parliamentary elections, and thus, currently has no seats in the parliament. However, in what is gearing up to be a tough and contentious political race, every percentage point could very much make the difference between a Democratic or Radical victory. Since the last election, Draskovic has modified his public stance on what role the monarchy could play in Serbia. His comments suggest that he is now more in the democratic camp, with a lucid observation of what Serbia needs to become a modern democratic state. Unlike leaders in the DS, Draskovic is advocating a much more vocal U.S. position during the election campaign, something that fits

his own personal vocal style. Draskovic is not afraid to speak up, and now he appears to be speaking up for a democratic, European Serbia. End Comment.  
MUNTER